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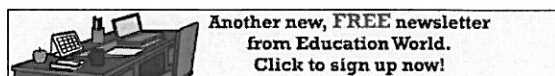
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SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ARTICLE

In-School Suspension: A Learning Tool

While educators agree that keeping suspended students in school is better than having them home unsupervised, schools need more than a room and a teacher for in-school suspension to change behavior. Structured programs that address multiple issues can help students get back to class faster and stay there. Included: Tips for creating successful in-school suspension programs.



As schools strive to keep more students in school, even disruptive ones, in-school suspension programs are seeing more students. But there is a big difference between having an in-school suspension program and having an effective one, educators and researchers said.

"The big plus of an in-school suspension program is that students are still in school, with all the potential for engaging them," said Anne Wheelock, a research associate with the Progress Through the Education Pipeline Project at Boston College's Lynch School of Education.

"Suspending students out of school means schools pass up the 'teachable moment' when they can connect with students, build relationships, and communicate that they belong in school.

"Having said that, in-school suspension programs can be little more than window-dressing designed to pull down out-of-school suspension numbers," Wheelock continued. "Poorly conceived and inadequately staffed programs, even though they are better than out-of-school suspensions, may be little more than holding tanks -- just a pro-forma stop on the route to out-of-school suspension or exclusion."

Read More

Read an Education World Wire Side Chat with Anne Wheelock, an education researcher, about evaluating and monitoring in-school suspension programs.

DISCIPLINE, NOT PUNISHMENT

The unappealing idea of students serving out-of-school suspensions roaming their communities during the day, possibly getting into more trouble, prompted some schools to create or expand their in-school suspension programs. In Louisiana, state officials became so concerned about suspended students missing instructional time that the legislature began funding in-school suspension programs.

The Kentucky Department of Education encourages school districts to develop policies that include well-rounded academic offerings for those students who stay in school during suspension.

The most effective in-school suspension programs have components to address students' academic and social needs, educators said, since frequently, suspended students have both academic and behavioral problems.

At the same time, in-school suspension often remains the final step before out of school suspension.

To be an effective learning tool, in-school suspension programs "should be one part of a school-wide strategy for creating and sustaining a positive, nurturing school climate, based on respectful relationships between teachers and students, teachers and teachers, students and students," Wheelock said. "Such a strategy would acknowledge that conflicts of all kinds occur in schools and should be based on a thoughtful set of approaches to resolving conflict and solving problems."

According to Wheelock, characteristics of good ISS programs include:

- Ways to ensure in-school suspension is appropriate; in-school suspension is unlikely to resolve a truancy or homework completion problem that should be resolved through other means.
- A term limit; students should not be suspended indefinitely.
- Problem-solving and/or mediation (including peer mediation) sessions among teachers and students or students and students, which result in written contracts that spell out future expectations.
- Ensuring students come to the program with academic assignments to complete.
- Professionals to staff the program, such as a teacher who can assess students for unidentified learning difficulties, assist in

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A MODEL HIGH SCHOOL PROGRAM

One high school with an in-school suspension program that has been gaining national attention is A.Crawford Mosley High School in Lynne Haven, Florida. The program, called Positive Alternative to School Suspension (PASS) operates as its own class, with explicit requirements and expectations, developed on the job by teacher Jim Lawson.

"Fifteen years ago, the district gave me a title and a room; I became the in-school suspension teacher for all of the high schools," Lawson told Education World. "I learned everything through trial and error. Now I have a model I follow, and I want to reach people who need help -- who have ISS programs that don't work."

Lawson, who now is responsible for just one high school program, lectures at national educators' conferences, and hosts about 20 people annually who come to observe the program. His approach is working; last year, only 67 out of 467 students did not complete the in-school suspension program and were assigned to out of school suspension, Lawson said.

"The program is designed so students can work themselves out of a little bit of trouble and keep their grades up," said Lawson, a former psychology teacher and coach. "I look at it as my classroom. I call it 'graduation' when they leave."

Students can choose in-school suspension over out-of-school suspension, and are assigned to in-school suspension for three, five, or ten days, where they work on assignments from their classes. All students start their suspension with an orientation. Lawson explains the expectations and rules of the program; students are graded daily in five areas based on a rubric. "The rubric also helps parents understand why their child is in trouble," Lawson said. "The orientation removes all the 'I didn't know's' from student excuses. Students are immediately responsible for their success or failure."

Areas in which students are graded include attendance, tardiness, ability to follow all rules, behavior, and work habits in class. Students receive a point for each violation in each category. If they accumulate five points, they are transferred to out-of-school suspension. If that happens, the highest grade they can receive for assignments they completed while assigned to in-school suspension is 60 (D).

While there is no formal counseling component in the high school ISS program, as there is in the middle school, Lawson said he often talks with students about why they were suspended and introduces strategies to prevent them from being suspended again. "I point out that if they were suspended for being tardy, and they haven't been tardy to suspension, that shows they can get to school on time."

MOLDING MIDDLE SCHOOLERS

Several middle school principals also told Education World that they prefer to use in-school suspension whenever they can.

"We try to think of it as a learning opportunity," said Jeanette Tendai, principal of North Kirkwood Middle School in Kirkwood, Missouri. "We call it the North Intervention Center."

The grade 6 to 8 school has been using ISS for nine years, and has few out-of-school suspensions, Tendai told Education World.

The fact that most students intensely dislike in-school suspension is a behavior management tool in itself. "It's very unpopular; it's not something kids are dying to get into," Tendai said. "They can't leave and they can't sleep, they have to remain engaged in their schoolwork."

Students are assigned to the intervention center, a separate room under adult supervision, for between one and five days, but only after other disciplinary measures have been tried. "Generally, it is not the first intervention," according to Tendai. "We try conferences, team meetings, and lunch detentions first."

If those interventions fail to change a student's behavior and he or she receives in-school suspension, on the first day the student is greeted by a teacher who reviews the school's rule book and discusses how they could have handled their situation differently.

Then students work on assignments from their classes. A teacher from their team checks on them daily to ensure assignments are being completed.

Building a Solid In-School Suspension Program

Jim Lawson, the in-school suspension teacher for 15 years in the Bay District Schools, Lynne Haven, Florida, told Education World these elements are critical for an effective in-school suspension program:

Preparation. Students and teachers need books and materials, and the teacher needs strategies to keep the students on task.

Orientation. Make sure the rules, benefits, and consequences of the program are clearly communicated. Lawson said he spends about 20 minutes with each new student.

Implementation. Make sure students do their work, the teacher keeps accurate records, and the teacher is fair and consistent.

Assessment. Every program should have a method for assessing students.

Most programs are missing an assessment program, according to Lawson. "Take away any two [of the four] and the program won't work," he said.

At the end of the suspension, students meet with an administrator or counselor before returning to class, according to Tendai. "I think it's effective," she said. "Most parents would prefer that their student stay in school. This gives us a middle step. The key is that the child changes his or her behavior."

LOTS OF PROCESSING...

At Falcon Middle School in Peyton, Colorado, safety and discipline incidents dropped dramatically after the school introduced an in-school suspension program in 2001-2002. "We had 437 safety and disciplinary incidents in 2000-2001 [before in-school suspension]," principal Bill Noxon told Education World. "In 2001-2002, we had 74."

While the number of in-school suspensions is growing this year, out-of-school suspensions are dropping, Noxon added. "I'd say in-school suspension works on 95 percent of the kids," he said. "We do have quite a few repeaters. Some kids take a little longer to understand things than others." Students are assigned to in-school suspension after three detentions (plus they must serve the detention). Another infraction that earns in-school suspension is fighting for the first time.

In-school suspension can last up to five days, during which time students report to a room, sit in a study carrel, and do their schoolwork. They are forbidden to talk and must eat their lunches there.

Originally, the program did not have a separate monitor; students were assigned to a room adjacent to the office so staff members could keep an eye on them. But Noxon quickly learned about the need for a full-time supervisor. "A kid started a fire," he said. "They need constant supervision."

Now a paraprofessional who is a West Point graduate oversees the in-school suspension program. "Students have to fill out a packet of information, and explain how they got into trouble," Noxon said. "The paraprofessional does a lot of processing with them as they go over information in the packet. She asks them about the choices they made."

Students also participate in 45 minutes of daily community service, which can include picking up trash on school grounds or putting together a packet of papers. "They need to do something with their hands," Noxon explained.

The shift away from out-of-school suspension has been a positive move, he added. "I think in-school suspension is much better," Noxon continued. "You can at least monitor them. If they are suspended for truancy, at least this keeps them in school and they get their work done."

WORKING WITH WHAT THEY HAVE

Other principals see the value of comprehensive in-school suspension programs, and hope to do more at their own schools. Dr. Marc McCoy, principal of Excelsior Middle School in Marion, Iowa, told Education World that a lack of funding has kept him from developing the program.

"Our in-school suspension program is not at the level we would like," McCoy said. "Most schools have more extensive behavior management components. We don't do much to actively help the kids. We keep using it as an alternative to sending kids home. That's the tool we have right now."

Usually one student at a time is assigned to in-school suspension, in a room near the main office, in sight of an adult. In at least half the cases, a teacher works with the student to help he or she catch up on schoolwork, McCoy added. "They often have both behavior and academic problems."

Infractions that earn students in-school suspension include fighting, theft, and blatant disrespect for authority. Between 20 and 30 students a year are suspended in-school, compared with between ten and 15 suspended outside of school.

While the in-school suspension program is not as extensive as McCoy would like, he still finds it preferable to sending a student home. "That [out-of-school suspension] gets the kid out of your hair, but it doesn't do much for the kid," he said. "They can get in more trouble during the day."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCE

[In-School Suspension: Some Research Could Improve Your Program](#)

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